

PROHIBITION.

GREAT SPEECH OF

SIR A. T. GALT, G.C.M.G.

Campaign Tract No. 2.

At a public meeting held in Sherbrooke, P. Q., under the auspices of the Quebec Branch of the Dominion Alliance for the Total Suppression of the Liquor Traffic, Sir A. T. Galt, who presided, spoke as follows:

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,—I think we may congratulate ourselves on the crowded audience we have to-night. It is a pleasing sign of sympathy with the earnest efforts put forth by the friends of the temperance cause to extend to the Dominion of Canada the benefits of recent legislation on that subject. When my friends in Montreal were kind enough to ask me to give them my assistance in Sherbrooke with reference to this movement I very gladly acquiesced. They were good enough to think that I possessed some small amount of influence in the Dominion, and, ladies and gentlemen, I felt that if I am happy enough to have any influence in our common country, that that influence is largely due to the confidence with which I have been honored by the people of the Eastern Townships, and especially by the people of Sherbrooke, for many years. (Applause.) If, therefore, there be

Published by order of the Quebec Provincial Alliance Executive.

any one place more than another where it is my duty to appear publicly to give my adherence to this great and good cause, I think this town of Sherbrooke is that place. (Cheers.) I do not propose this evening to make any appeal to your sympathies. The cause which is advocated here will find other and more eloquent gentlemen to make those appeals. Fortune has generally required me to deal with any subject on which I had to speak rather with the hard facts that surround it, rather with the reasons which attend it, than with those passions and sympathies regarding it which others may, perhaps, have a greater gift in exciting. What I propose is to show the process of reasoning in my own mind by which, after a comparatively long life, I have come to the conclusion that it is the duty of every good citizen to promote this pre-eminently useful work. (Hear, hear.) I have been struck, as we all have, with the fact of what we call the hard times, under which we have suffered during the last five years, and under which the country is still suffering, and I have noticed that the consequence of these hard times has been to produce on all hands, on every side, and in every family, economy. Economy has been found to be absolutely necessary as the only wholesome and reliable cure for much of the distress which previous extravagance had brought upon us. Believing that to be the case, I could not help considering what was the most costly article of consumption in this country,—the one which we could most easily spare, the one which costs us the most in its indulgence, and I did not fail to find that it was in the use,—in the consumption of intoxicating liquors. (Hear, hear.) Reference was made last night by our Chairman, Mr. Brooks, to the amount of revenue that is derived from spirits and wines and beer. The amount is not quite so large as he stated it, but still quite large enough to excite the apprehensions of everyone who is opposed to seeing the resources of his country wasted. Last year the official reports show that the amount of revenue raised from the three articles I have mentioned was \$4,367,000. Now, it will be observed, ladies and gentlemen, that it is not the amount of revenue that is raised upon these articles which is the measure of their cost to the country,—very far from it, that is

only the proportion which is taken by the Government. That amount must be multiplied at least by four to ascertain the real cost of those articles, especially that of spirits. It represents a consumption, and I may say, with scarcely an exception, a useless consumption of at least \$16,000,000 per annum (hear, hear), an amount which is very nearly equal to the whole amount of the commercial failures in the country on the average for the last five years. While I am speaking on this subject of the revenue derived from these beverages, I may take occasion to remark that though the amount is not so large as it was stated last night, when it was put at six millions, it is quite large enough—for it is four and a half millions—and that is one of the difficulties which have in the future to be met with in advocating total prohibition. Now, there is another point mentioned by my friend, Rev. Mr. Duff, last night, which I think I may say two or three words about. In his eloquent remarks he referred to the amount of revenue raised from ardent spirits, and in terms which were probably understood by the audience, and were so understood by me as charging upon the Government what really amounted to a great sin in obtaining this money (hear, hear). I am quite sure that that could not have been what Mr. Duff proposed the meeting should understand. The truth is, that far from the Government being blame-worthy in raising that amount from spirits, they are acting precisely in the direction that is most in the interests of temperance. The more money they raise from spirits the more expensive those beverages become, and clearly the less they are within the reach of the poorer classes of this country, and I should be glad if, instead of four millions and a half, the Government had been able to raise twice that sum. (Hear, hear.) If they could raise twice that amount to-morrow from this particular source it would be unquestionably a move in the right direction, and one for which instead of blaming the Government we should support it, for we should be glad to know that so large a portion of the taxation necessary to the Government of this country is drawn from a source which our object should be to dry up, since it is drawn from an article of consumption which is, in very many respects, and

perhaps wholly, injurious to the well-being of society at large. But to return to the question of the cost to the country of the consumption of ardent spirits and other strong drinks, I have stated that the loss in actual consumption cannot be put at less than \$16,000,000. But all of us know—painfully know—that the direct cost represents but a very small part of the indirect cost. The indirect cost is, in its influence upon society, infinitely greater, infinitely more onerous, than the direct charge. I would gladly see the whole of the sixteen millions thrown into the St. Francis River if I could be sure that in doing so we had wiped out the infinite evils that arise from the consumption of those articles. (Great applause.) Now, the position of this country,—a country struggling to establish for itself a prosperous future, where we have to develop the present natural resources of the country, under great difficulties—a country under these circumstances cannot wisely afford to waste anything. Our business should be, as far as possible, to retain within our reach all the sources of wealth and of industry which we are able to secure, and, therefore, if we find that one particular cause produces enormous waste to the country, an enormous waste of money, an enormous waste of energy, and, I am sorry to say, an enormous destruction of intellect, then, I say, it becomes the duty of the Government, and of every good citizen, to do their best to diminish that waste and correct those evils. (Hear, hear.) If we examine the course of the temperance question in the past—and I remember perfectly well myself the phases it has taken—we find that it commenced with arguments, with public addresses, with appeals, and, in many cases, strong appeals, to the sympathies and passions of the people. From that point, as soon as it had established itself in the minds of a certain number of the community, it then assumed the form of organization, and temperance societies were established. At first they did not go beyond prohibiting the consumption of ardent spirits, and afterwards the more energetic of their members went to the extent of the total abstinence societies, and in that way public opinion was educated up to the point when legislation was resorted to in aid

of the efforts which benevolent gentlemen had made to correct this evil. And it is in that way that we have reached the point arrived at to-night of discussing the Canada Temperance Act. Indeed, it is quite useless, if we should attempt it, to outrun public opinion. If there is one thing more necessary than another in reference to any social reform or any social question, it is this: That you should convince public opinion that you are right, and then you will carry it with you. If you do not do so, one of two results will follow—either you will surprise a victory from your opponents—and that will be followed by a reaction and defeat—or you will fail altogether to obtain the victory. It must be by the intelligent education of the people on these subjects that you can create such a public sentiment as will enable you to give effect to the legislation that you obtain from time to time. Now, I think, with regard to legislation, and to what is known as the Dunkin Act, that the advocates of temperance have great reason to be thankful for the progress that has been made under it. I am aware that in many districts it may not have worked altogether well, but still the fact that so many counties and so many townships in Ontario and Quebec have put themselves voluntarily under the operation of the Dunkin Act, I think is one of the strongest evidences possible that public opinion in these districts was running parallel with the thought of those gentlemen who have from time to time been the organizers of this movement. (Hear, hear.) We have now reached the point, as I said before, of the Canada Temperance Act of last session, and I am happy to be able to announce to you that at the close of my few remarks, you will have the pleasure of listening to an explanation of that Act by the Rev. Mr. Gales, which I am sure will be exceedingly interesting. It is now sought to give effect to that legislation through what is known as the Dominion Alliance. Now, this Alliance is only, as it were, in the process of inception; it is not altogether organized or a fixed fact yet. It is in the interests of this organization in the Province of Quebec that this meeting is being held here to-night. The Dominion Alliance is not a Temperance Society or a Total Abstinence Society, but it is one

the object of which is to include every one who desires to see the use of, and the traffic, in intoxicating liquors banished from the country. As I understand it the object is to make the platform so broad that every one can put himself in line with it. Perhaps a good many of my friends here may be surprised to see me presiding at a temperance meeting (applause), but I hope as I grow older that I may grow wiser (loud cheers), and that, at any rate, in regard to any good object, I hope I am never too old to learn. (Hear, hear.) When the question has been put before me, and I have been told that I have a moral duty to perform, or can serve a moral purpose by becoming a member of a total abstinence society—and that is a question which I have revolved in my own mind very seriously for several years past—I have said this: I am perfectly willing at once to give up the use of intoxicating drinks if you will guarantee to me that it will do any good (hear, hear); if you will only guarantee that my doing so will be the means of preventing my friend from getting it, whether he likes it or not. That is the train of thought which has passed through my own mind, and, no doubt, through the minds of many other men like myself. The sacrifice of their own enjoyments, I have no doubt, many who do not belong to a temperance society will gladly make when they understand that in giving up that which they may not consider hurtful to themselves, they really produce a good result to other individuals. (Hear, hear.) Now, I am bound to say—and I hope my friends from Montreal will not find fault with me for saying it—that I think the principles defined on the Dominion Alliance cards go a little further than they will carry everybody with them. In the remarks which fell from Mr. Dougall last night, which I think were exceedingly sensible, and they certainly commended themselves to my judgment, he spoke of the desirability of carrying everyone with them so far as they could, and gradually preparing for something better in the future. Now, if we examine this question of Intemperance I think that ninety-nine men out of a hundred, and all the ladies, will agree with this proposition: That the great and crying evils of Intemperance are rather to be traced to the use of ardent spirits than to the other fermented liquors. That is

my own observation. It may be quite true, as is alleged, that the taste for ardent spirits is increased by indulgence in other liquors; but the great and crying evils, the crime, the domestic cruelty to wives and children,—those evils, I believe, are to be traced in all cases rather to an indulgence in ardent spirits than to others more innocuous. I believe the gentlemen of the Dominion Alliance will carry ten persons with them in favor of prohibiting the manufacture and importation of spirits to five persons who will support them in endeavoring to prohibit all kinds of liquors. That is my impression, and I merely throw it out in consequence of the remarks that fell from Mr. Dougall last night. It might be well to follow a similar course to that followed by temperance societies when they were first initiated. If I mistake not, that was their original starting point—that they only prohibited the use of ardent spirits. I think that when you propose to the nation at large to deal with this subject it would be well to be guided by the experience of the past. When you have struck down the greatest source of the evil it will be comparatively easy for you to carry public opinion in any further steps you may find it necessary to take. (Hear, hear.) If I have said a few words which may perhaps be considered a little discouraging, though I do not regard them as such, I would like to say something which I think is rather encouraging. In that respect I wish to deal with two great objections which are raised to the Alliance and to the object that is ultimately sought to be attained. Now, these objections are, first, the difficulty which the Government of the country would experience in replacing the revenue that would be lost by the prohibition of the traffic; and the other objection is that prohibition is incompatible with what we regard as true British freedom. With reference to the first, I think I may say that if a change were made by prohibiting spirits in the first instance and afterwards fermented liquors, the change would be more gradual, and consequently the difficulty of meeting the loss of revenue would be diminished. But I am quite prepared to sustain this statement, after having had a good deal to do with the question of revenue and the raising of taxation. I am quite prepared to assert before

this audience to-night that the Finance Minister who should succeed, by prohibiting the traffic in intoxicating liquors, in restoring \$16,000,000 now lost to the people of this country and wholly wasted,—the Finance Minister who should succeed in doing that and should also save the indirect loss that arises from the injury that is done to society by it,—I say he will have no difficulty whatever in raising the sum of money which appears in the first instance to be thus lost to the revenue. (Loud cheers.) There can be no doubt whatever about it. One of the bugbears about taxation with which we are met is that of direct taxation. Now, I will venture to say this: that when you have educated the people of this country up to the point of prohibiting this traffic, you will at the same time have educated them up to the point of paying direct taxes sufficient to meet this deficiency. Another objection is that we would not be exactly free men. Well, now, that is a point upon which I take the liberty of differing entirely from those who urge it. The law now restrains our liberty in everything that is injurious to us—in most things at least. Liberty, as I understand the true definition of it, is freedom to do good. As a necessary consequence of the ability to do good, you must have the prevention of evil. Therefore freedom is in harmony with everything which goes to suppress vice in the community. Besides that, we have a case in point which must be familiar to you all. We know that for the last two hundred years the Indians have been prohibited from using liquors. There have been penalties attached to the people who sold it to them, and why? Because in the eyes of the law they were regarded as minors, as children unfit to take care of themselves, and consequently they were by law prevented from taking that which was injurious to them. No one supposes that this prohibition has injured the Indian; on the contrary, it is known that that is the only way by which any portion of that race has been preserved in North America. It is solely owing to their having been prevented from using intoxicating liquors that there are any of them alive to-day. Another objection is often raised, on the ground that the nation has no right to interfere with vested interests. In reply, I affirm that there is

nothing in the manufacture or sale of liquor which in any respect, differs from any other branch of commercial industry. We see sugar refineries, cotton and woollen factories, and all other mechanical industries, exposed to hazard and loss by changes in the fiscal system of the country, but no one ever dreams of their owners having any claim for indemnity; and I wholly fail to discover anything in the cause of a distiller which entitles him to different and more generous treatment. His investment must share the same risks that are encountered by every other member of the community. The conclusion at which I have arrived myself from a somewhat lengthened consideration of this subject is that the only ultimate safety is undoubtedly to be found in the perfect carrying out of the views of the Dominion Alliance. (Hear, hear, and applause.) But, at the same time, I perceive clearly enough that public opinion is not yet ripe for that measure. It must be brought up to that, and in order to bring it to that point we have before us to-day the Canada Temperance Act, which is regarded as a very considerable step in the direction pursued as the one most in the interests of society. I cannot fail to see that while the present Act is in itself wise, it is at the same time the best preparation for future progress, which will be carried out, perhaps, after we are gone. It is a question that will live, and we have evidence that it will grow. (Hear, hear.) This growth may be slow, but at the same time as long as it appeals to the sound common sense of a community such as ours; so long as its advocates depend upon facts and arguments that cannot be questioned, then I venture to say that they must in the end and finally succeed. (Hear, hear) I have, therefore, no hesitation whatever in personally urging upon you as your Chairman this night to give all reasonable support in the first place to the objects of the Dominion Alliance, and next to the more immediate point of putting in force the Canada Temperance Act. Now, there is one other subject which, as I may not address you again very soon, I may refer to. Mr. Dougall told us last night, and with a great deal of truth, that a work of this kind cannot be carried on without a certain pecuniary support. It requires more than the moral support; more than the

intellectual support of its friends; it requires the pecuniary aid of those who desire to see its objects promoted. I agree entirely with him on that point, and in case my friend Mr. Dougall should ask me what my sympathy is worth, I may take this opportunity of saying—and I hope I am not the first who has done so—that my sympathy on this occasion is worth a subscription of one hundred dollars. (Hear, hear, and applause.) Thanking you for your kind attention, I will call upon Mr. Gales to be good enough to give us explanations of the Canada Temperance Act. (Loud applause.)

